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Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 1 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Miss MASON

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES

Initial report of Thailand

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Thailand (CRC/C/11/Add.13, HRI/CORE/1/Add.78, CRC/C/Q/THA/1; written replies of the Government of Thailand to the questions raised in the list of issues)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Thailand took places at the Committee table.

2. Ms. CHUTIKUL (Thailand), introducing the members of her delegation, said she would call on the two high school students representing the children of Thailand on the delegation to speak first.

3. Ms. LOHAKITJA (Thailand), a 17 year-old pupil from a girls' high school in Bangkok, said the process of selecting children's representatives for the delegation had been initiated by the National Youth Bureau. With the assistance of the Ministry of Education, a number of television programmes and the Foundation for Women and UNICEF, two representatives had been selected from a number of candidates, one of either sex and one from a rural and one from an urban area.

4. The situation of children was largely affected by the family. In Thailand, that still meant to some extent the traditional extended family, which generally provided a secure and comforting haven for the child, although children's rights were not always observed. Many bodies in Thailand, both governmental and non-governmental, including the National Youth Bureau, were engaged in publicizing the Convention. However, despite some training of teachers, information on children's rights and obligations was not always reaching the children themselves. One of the results of that lack of awareness was the prevalence of problems such as drug addiction, child labour, child prostitution and violence against children. A number of programmes had been introduced in schools to help combat such problems, one such being the "friend-to-friend" programme, sponsored in part by the private sector, in which children helped each other to prevent problems arising, were provided with information on the dangers of drug abuse and the risk of HIV/AIDS and trained as youth leaders against abuse of various kinds.

5. Under the new Constitution, the minimum age of employment had been raised from 13 to 15. There had also been public information campaigns against child labour through television and other media. Child prostitution was a problem that affected not only Thai children but also children coming in from neighbouring countries, which were being appealed to for cooperation in efforts to end the practice. Thailand was also engaged in public information campaigns against sex tourism.

6. The use of violence against children was in some aspects sanctioned by Thai culture, which accepted corporal punishment as evidence of care for the child. However, perceptions were changing and alternative forms of school discipline were being introduced, whereby unacceptable behaviour was punished

by lower marks, notification of parents and ultimately where necessary expulsion of the child. The key issue was education and particularly overcoming the inadequate awareness resulting from the generation gap.

7. Mr. PUKJAI (Thailand), a 17 year-old senior high school pupil from a child welfare boarding school in the north-east of Thailand, said that the traditional extended family had its advantages. If a child was abandoned by its parents, for instance, as had happened in his own case, it could remain in the family and be looked after by other family members. On the other hand, corporal punishment of children was more common.

8. Almost 95 per cent of children in Thailand had access to education and could read and write. However, rural children still did not enjoy as many educational facilities as urban children. His school was one of the many established under the sponsorship of the King to provide education for disadvantaged children, some 50 per cent of whom would otherwise have no access to school. A number of organizations gave assistance to schools. In his own school, where education was free, some 20 places were supported by a non-governmental foundation and UNICEF was providing programmes that included vocational training. The current economic crisis had led the Ministry of Education to provide some assistance for children whose parents were out of work. In addition, various forms of income generation from work under school auspices had been devised to help children from poor families earn some money as a means of ensuring that their education was not too great a drain on their families. Money earned in that way during school holidays was placed in an education fund for the child.

9. Educational programmes broadcast to schools by satellite were being introduced in secondary schools in some rural areas. Such programmes were designed for direct interaction with children, the teacher acting in an advisory capacity only. The programmes could be recorded in order to assist children who had difficulty in following them.

10. Most sexual abuse of children took place within the family. In Thai culture children were expected to show gratitude to their parents, which often meant that they made no complaint of such abuse. However, children abused in that way frequently became abusers themselves when they became adults. Many organizations existed to prevent child abuse and to help abused children.

11. Although legislation existed to prohibit corporal punishment of children by teachers, time was needed to change attitudes and develop greater sensitivity to children's needs. Many teachers had themselves been beaten when they were at school and tended to consider corporal punishment a normal practice.

12. Ms. CHUTIKUL (Thailand) said that the economic crisis that was so severely shaking Thailand and its people threatened what had already been achieved towards implementing the Convention. The social impact of most concern was rising unemployment, entailing lost income and increased poverty, with 1.6 million people currently out of work. Some 2,000 companies had already ceased operation and it was expected that 400,000 people in all would be laid off by the end of the year. Children would inevitably be among those who would have to bear the brunt of the crisis. Reduction in family incomes

had already led to an increase in an already high school drop-out rate, about a third of the 800,000 drop-outs in the current year being directly attributable to the crisis. Great attention would have to be focused on the problem.

13. The inflation resulting from the crisis had reduced the supply of medicines to hospitals, while the rising cost of food was likely to have a long-term detrimental effect on the nutritional and health status of children. Increased stress resulting from the crisis might also aggravate the growing problem of violence and abuse in the family.

14. In addition to its commitment to financial restructuring and to restoring the economy, the Government was endeavouring to mitigate the social impact of the crisis. With assistance from the World Bank, the Japanese Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund and the Asian Development Bank, it was putting a comprehensive social programme together aimed at creating jobs, providing training and easing access to basic services. The current crisis had led to a review of the economic and social agenda, leading to acceptance of the need for overall social reform, including greater attention to children's issues.

15. The Convention had assisted Thailand in its successful efforts to improve the survival and development of its children. Infant and maternal mortality had decreased considerably and primary school enrolment and literacy rates had risen. However, although most Thai children had access to basic services, attention still needed to be paid to disadvantaged children and many child protection problems still remained.

16. Child labour continued to be a crucial concern, since some 16 per cent of children between 10 and 14 years of age were in some form of employment. Preventive measures were being applied with the help of international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The new Labour Protection Act (1998) would provide greater protection against exploitation, raising the minimum age of employment from 13 to 15. The Act also prohibited the sexual harassment of women and children. Traditional attitudes and practices were a major factor in perpetuating child labour and would also need to be tackled.

17. The commercial sexual exploitation of children was one of the most serious violations of their rights and in many cases took place with the connivance of their families. Thailand had adopted a national policy and plan of action to combat such exploitation that comprised both prevention and protection. Access to education and training was being provided to girls at risk of being lured into sexual exploitation. Efforts were being made to coordinate action on the matter with the tourism authorities and with hotels catering for tourists. New laws had been adopted in the past two years to combat prostitution and trafficking in women and children, with improved protection for victims and harsher penalties for those involved in organizing such activities. The problem still remained of enforcing the law against customers and procurers. A total of 22 cases were before the courts and nine persons had been sentenced. A National Committee on Trafficking in

Women and Children had recently been established to address the problem of cross-border trafficking and to collaborate on the issue with the other countries involved.

18. Migration of workers from neighbouring countries continued to be a major concern. Unaccompanied children illegally entering the country in search of work were likely to end up in immigration detention centres. The policy was to repatriate such children as rapidly as possible without prosecuting them, provided they were not also involved in criminal activity such as drug trafficking. However, more attention needed to be given to improving the treatment of such children in detention centres and providing them with access to basic services. Work was also needed in collaboration with their countries of origin to ensure that once repatriated such children received appropriate assistance.

19. Armed conflict in Cambodia and Myanmar had led to a new influx of displaced persons, including children. Although Thailand was not a signatory of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its Protocol, it had adopted the humanitarian principle of according them temporary refuge and permitting non-governmental organizations to assist in the provision of shelter, food and other basic necessities. The children of displaced persons received comparable and in some cases better care than their Thai counterparts. The Government had recently reached an agreement with UNHCR, due to come into force in October 1998, that would give that agency an enhanced role in addressing the needs of such displaced persons.

20. Efforts to overcome the problems of hill tribes included work by the Government to register hill tribes people and accord them Thai nationality under the law. However, more work was necessary since a considerable number of children still remained undocumented and hence stateless.

21. Juvenile justice was emerging as another concern for Thailand, and laws had been amended to ensure the child's best interests. A draft Criminal Procedure Code supported by UNICEF, ensuring children better treatment in the judicial process and in courts, had already been accepted in principle by the lower house of Parliament. The establishment of Juvenile and Family courts nationwide, the elimination of corporal and capital punishment, and the introduction of practical alterations to the juvenile justice system remained future objectives.

22. New initiatives and structures had been introduced to address the growing problem of abuse and violence in the family. A child protection system was being established at provincial level and a network for the prevention of violence against women and children was being set up under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration to provide multidisciplinary assistance to victims of abuse and violence. A national policy and plan was being developed with special emphasis on family counselling.

23. Unfortunately, the HIV/AIDS epidemic was increasingly affecting, and in not a few cases destroying, the lives of Thai children. HIV-infected children were given institutional care and other relevant support such as scholarships for education. Although most children of AIDS-infected mothers were not themselves infected, they suffered the emotional, psychosocial and economic

consequences of AIDS. Some 30,000 children had already been orphaned and the number would probably grow to 200,000 before any decline could be expected. Governmental and non-governmental agencies had collaborated in providing the children concerned with boarding facilities and other types of support, with special emphasis on community-based care. The initiatives of His Majesty the King had been beneficial in drawing attention to the welfare of AIDS orphans. Day-care centres and secondary schools had been established under His Majesty's patronage. Children with HIV-infected parents and their families received assistance in many forms, including financial support and counselling services. One of the critical challenges in the future would be to change public attitudes, since the children still faced discriminatory attitudes and treatment by Thai society.

24. The phenomenon of drug addiction was affecting children increasingly. The growing use of amphetamines had added to the variety of drugs used by schoolchildren. Children, not necessarily addicted themselves, were sometimes forced to sell drugs. As part of the effort to tackle the problem, the Ministry of Education had recently launched a "Drug-Free School project" targeting all schools under the Ministry's supervision. In that connection, she was pleased to report that the draft Money Laundering Act, which covered drug abuse and prostitution, had already been considered by the Senate.

25. Over the past few years, there had been many positive developments aimed at laying the foundation for more effective work on behalf of children's rights. The most important was the promulgation of the new Thai Constitution in 1997. It was unique, in that for the first time the people had been allowed to participate in the drafting process from the outset. It was also the first child-friendly Constitution, specifically guaranteeing the right of children to be protected against discrimination, violence and unfair treatment. It also clearly committed the Government to the fulfilment of the obligations set out in all the international treaties and declarations to which Thailand was a signatory. Among its most positive and innovative aspects was an unprecedented clause requiring the establishment of a National Human Rights Committee. As an adviser to the body drafting the organic law for its formation, she had tried to include as one of its main functions the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She had also chaired a committee to analyse Thai regulations in connection with human rights instruments to which the country was a signatory, as well as treaties which it had not yet signed, giving consideration to the reasons for not signing, so that recommendations could be made for the formulation of a Master Plan of Action on Human Rights, to include children's and women's rights.

26. Thailand's accession to the Convention had led to a growing consensus among governmental and non-governmental organizations with regard to the need for action to promote the right of children to be heard and to participate in decisions affecting them. Children's participation had been incorporated into the current National Child and Youth Development Plan, which, together with the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan, had been the first in Thai history to be formulated with the participation of every sector of

society, including children. The recent public hearings, covering all the provinces of Thailand, had seen children and youth leaders participating in recommendations for the effective implementation of the Convention.

27. While Thailand was proud of the progress achieved, it was conscious of the many shortcomings and that a great deal remained to be done. She assured the Committee of Thailand's determination to take up the challenge. Despite the present economic calamities, she remained hopeful that, through partnership with the Government, the private sector and most of all the people, the country would be able to achieve a brighter future for its children.

28. In conclusion, she expressed her appreciation to UNICEF Thailand for its support in ensuring that the principles of children's rights were realized, especially in regard to those most at risk and in need of special protection measures. She thanked all those international organizations and Governments which were working with Thailand and helping it to achieve better lives for the children. Her delegation looked forward to hearing the Committee's questions, comments and recommendations.

29. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the head of the Thai delegation for introducing her country's report and for the written replies to the list of issues. She invited the members of the Committee to put their questions.

30. Mrs. MBOI said that the Committee was gratified to welcome so high-ranking a delegation and particularly appreciated the presence of the two young people. Although the initial report did not fully follow the guidelines, it was highly detailed and comprehensive. Sometimes, the process of preparation could be as important as the report itself, and she had been very impressed by the tone of the report, showing close involvement by the NGO community in its preparation.

31. She noted that Thailand had acceded to the Convention in 1992. The initial report should therefore have been submitted in 1994, although it had actually been received in 1996. What had been the cause of the delay? Between 1996 and the present consideration of the report, however, the whole Asian region had been thrown into economic turmoil. In addition to the information in the written replies, therefore, she would like to know what the impact of the crisis had been on the efforts to improve the country's legal and administrative infrastructure. The honest and self-critical tone of the written replies was particularly impressive. In the reply to question 4, for example, it was admitted that, in practice, the implementation of plans and policies at regional and local levels was relatively weak, being neither comprehensive nor fully coherent.

32. At the end of her statement, the head of the delegation had again stressed the partnership between the Government, NGOs and the international community. Since the economic crisis was having an important impact not only on the budget but also on the income of civil servants, what effect could be expected on the morale and efficiency of government services? In the NGO sector as well, resources for staff were greatly diminished. How could they be helped to maintain their important role in working for children in a period of great need and reduced resources?

33. During a meeting on the consideration of national reports, organized by UNICEF in Bangkok in May 1998, it had been suggested that the Committee spent too much time on general measures of implementation and too little on special measures of protection. What balance, leading to realistic recommendations for implementation by the State party that could really be of help to children, would the Thai delegation like to see among the eight groups of issues?

34. There were a number of points on which she would particularly like to hear the views of the two young people. She asked Ms. Lohakitja, who had spoken about the dissemination of the Convention and the fact that many children were not yet aware of it, how she herself had heard about it and what her reaction had been. Both young people had spoken about sexual abuse and child prostitution. Did they and their friends at school talk about those things and what was their reaction to them? Did they also talk among themselves in school about substance abuse and drug addiction? She asked Mr. Pukjai how he felt about working during the school holidays. Since he came from a poor region, had he or his friends been obliged to work in order to contribute to the family income? If so, what work had he done and how did he feel about it?

35. Mrs. OUEDRAOGO said that the report and the introductory statement of the head of the delegation showed an encouraging awareness of the problems facing the children of Thailand and the solutions that were needed. She asked whether the Government had accepted the many specific proposals made in the report and integrated them into its programmes. In regard to general measures of implementation, she noted that the new Constitution guaranteed a wide range of rights. What steps had been taken to ensure their implementation, including measures to bring about the necessary changes in public attitudes? When the work on the legislation and regulations currently under discussion was completed, would all the measures relating to children's rights be assembled in the form of a Children's Code?

36. Additional information would also be useful on the stage reached in carrying out the Eighth National Social and Economic Development Plan for 1997-2001, and the extent to which children were involved in implementing it. They needed to be agents in the process, not simply the objects of action by others. She welcomed the many indications of successful cooperation with NGOs and would like to know how the work of carrying out programmes was divided between them and the Government. In the funding of projects, what was the balance between NGO and government resources? She understood that it had been planned to hold a seminar on relations between Thailand and the four neighbouring countries. Had that seminar been held and, if so, what was the outcome? Had any progress been made yet in translating the Convention and the report into the languages of the various ethnic groups? What progress had been made, through cooperation with neighbouring countries, in regard to child prostitution and trafficking in children? She understood that universities in Thailand were actively engaged in research into the various issues affecting children. How far did the Government use the results of such research? Were there any plans to disseminate the report itself, possibly for use in training workers involved with children? How familiar was the general public in Thailand, and the children especially, with the terms of the Convention?

37. Mr. RABAH said that the Thai Government had entered reservations, on grounds of national security, to certain provisions of the Convention relating to nationality and to refugee children. He would like to ask the two young people, therefore, how they felt about having refugee children in their country. Did they feel that there was discrimination between them and the refugee children and had they any friends among them? He would like to know more about the relationship. On the report itself, he would like more details about the way in which the NGOs had participated.

38. Ms. PALME had been particularly impressed by the open-mindedness displayed by the two young people. They had spoken frankly about the negative impact of the tradition of corporal punishment as well as the pressure on children to feel gratitude to their parents, and the effect of both on their future actions and attitudes. They had been equally frank about the sexual abuse of children within the family. Young people of their sort carried the key to change for the future. She hoped that they represented society's growing awareness of the need for change.

39. The picture given in the report of real cooperation and partnership between the Government and NGOs was encouraging. Listening to the head of the delegation, she had felt that, despite the difficulties caused by the economic crisis, good intentions with regard to children remained fully alive. In that connection, she would like to know what support the National Youth Bureau received from other government departments, in particular the Ministry of Finance. Had it pressed as hard as possible for resources to be used on behalf of children?

40. She associated herself with the questions already asked in regard to the Thai Government's reservations to the Convention. Those reservations, which were not the usual ones, related to the nationality and status of refugee children. She urged the Government to use the internationally accepted definition of refugee and to accede at once to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

41. Mrs. MOKHUANE said that she would like more information on the dissemination of the Convention, particularly in the rural areas, and on the amount of the national budget allocated to education and child welfare. It was suggested in the report that the centralized system of government was partly responsible for the slow rate at which problems were solved. She asked whether there was any move towards decentralization. The functions of the Youth Bureau and the Sub-Committee on Child Rights in regard to coordination and the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention seemed to be identical. Given the limited resources available, she wondered whether it was realistic to keep the two bodies. She welcomed the current review of legislation relating to the Juvenile Justice System. However, there seemed to be an attitudinal problem regarding law enforcement. How could children be assured of a fair trial if there was a high rate of corruption and bribery among the police? In connection with the problem of access to education in rural areas referred to in the report, she noted that the distance-learning programme provided by satellite was for secondary schools. Was there any plan to broaden and enhance the project?

42. Mrs. KARP asked to what extent education was available to children in remote areas and whether the Convention was ever cited for interpretative purposes in court cases, despite the fact that it could not be invoked as a legal basis. The somewhat vague wording of Thailand's reservations to the Convention provided the authorities with very considerable freedom of interpretation, as demonstrated by the situation concerning refugees who had entered the country illegally. She welcomed the fact that the reservation to article 29 had been withdrawn and appealed to the Government to withdraw the remainder.

43. While acknowledging the national security implications of the presence of foreign nationals on Thai soil, she was concerned about the ramifications of classifying displaced persons and asylum seekers as illegal immigrants, and about the fate of persons repatriated to Myanmar. Meanwhile, the presence in Thailand of a minority group of illegal immigrants with limited access to services might ultimately generate a security problem of a different kind. She urged the Thai Government to accede to the international instruments relating to refugees. Did the National Child and Youth Development Plan make explicit reference to the rights embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Excessive centralization might account for the fact that the Convention had not been widely publicized at the local level, and a greater degree of involvement by grass-roots NGOs might compensate to some extent for budget cutbacks. The reduction in the training budget was particularly regrettable since the public (and particularly professional persons, members of the police force and public officials) needed to learn how to use the Convention as a tool to implement rights, solve problems and change attitudes. Had any consideration been given to involving children in training for adults?

44. Where the eradication of corruption was concerned, legislation had to be backed up by enforcement measures, such as bringing offenders to trial and publicizing their sentences. It was unfortunate that financial constraints had prevented the full implementation of the National Child and Youth Development Plan, since maltreatment, abuse and corporal punishment were widespread and were even considered by some to be acceptable, which suggested that, on the contrary, increased budget allocations were needed to ensure the full exercise of the protection afforded to children under the Thai Constitution. She welcomed the information that an ombudsman for children was to be appointed, which would represent a major step forward in rendering children's rights effective.

45. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Thai Government's reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child were intended to compensate for the fact that no reservations had been made to similar provisions in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. She asked the younger members of the delegation whether they felt any responsibility to inform their community and the country as a whole of the rights embodied in the Convention. To what extent were children at their school aware of the existence of the Convention?

46. Ms. LOHAKITJA *(Thailand) said that some information on children's rights* was contained in the curriculum for social and health studies, and such rights also had a bearing on matters relating to employment and to the minimum age for joining the army or for acquiring an identity card. The Ministry for

Education intended to incorporate the subject of children's rights into the general curriculum, but on the whole awareness among children was not yet extensive.

47. Mr. PUKJAI (Thailand) said that children often demonstrated an intuitive awareness of their rights, for instance by submitting a complaint to the Ministry of Education when unacceptable food was served at school.

48. Ms. LOHAKITJA (Thailand) described the Associated Schools Project, which was a network to train youth leaders who made field visits to different areas and institutions in order to gain an insight into the needs of children. Cases of sexual abuse were reported in the newspapers; it was most regrettable that Thailand should be considered by other countries to be a centre of prostitution, including child prostitution. Students were certainly concerned by the situation.

49. Mr. PUKJAI (Thailand) expressed his anger towards adults who abused children, particularly as such behaviour might be perpetuated in future generations. A teacher who had been reported by a child for administering corporal punishment had been dismissed and expelled from the profession. On the subject of holiday employment, he said that schools offered training courses during the holidays, particularly to street children, bringing in instructors in different specialist areas. Children could also obtain credit to set up their own cooperative enterprises. Once the loan had been repaid, the profits were distributed among the partners in the enterprise.

50. Responding to Mr. Rabah's question regarding discrimination against refugees, he said that, in his home province, which bordered on Cambodia, displaced persons were provided with housing by the Thai Government and received food donations from international organizations. They traded with the local population, which was sympathetic to their plight.

51. Ms. LOHAKITJA (Thailand) said that a counterpart to children's rights lay in their duty to do their best at school, to be good citizens and to obey the law.

52. Mr. PUKJAI (Thailand), on the subject of obligations, considered it vital for children to be well-behaved and heed their guardians and teachers. Enjoyment of rights did not confer licence to make undue claims on society; indeed, children had a responsibility to their country and society.

53. Responding to Mrs. Karp's question concerning equality of opportunity, he said he counted himself fortunate to be attending the special school set up under the King's patronage, which catered for disadvantaged children of all kinds: poor children, street children, those from poor families, and victims of natural disasters. Applicants were admitted only after authentication of their disadvantaged background, whereupon they were supplied free of charge with all books, facilities and educational materials.

54. Ms. CHUTIKUL (Thailand) thanked the Committee for its recognition of Thailand's receptiveness to NGO cooperation, which was now generally welcome, following initial governmental suspicion. Both categories of organization had their weaknesses. For example, virtually all government activity was hampered

by inordinate red tape and the myriad committees which needed to be established before action could be taken, combined with constant transfers of civil servants from one department to another, and the instability and lack of continuity caused by frequent changes of political leaders. The latter, in turn, usually made their own appointments to crucial posts. The NGOs, on the other hand, enjoyed greater flexibility and the capacity to act more expeditiously, although they were subject to constraints of their own, such as the rapid turnover of personnel, many of whom were volunteers, coupled with their dependence on resources and often policy instructions from their headquarters abroad. However, they complemented each other and, all in all, their cooperation was positive, with NGOs represented on all national commissions, as decreed by the Constitution.

55. In response to Mrs. Mokhuane's question on the relationship between the National Youth Bureau (NYB) and the Sub-Committee on Child Rights, she explained that they were a single body. The NYB was an umbrella organization comprising a number of subcommittees, the one on child rights, chaired by an NGO representative, being one of many. She had herself years ago founded the National Council for Child and Youth Development, another very active umbrella organization for NGOs. Those organizations had assisted with the preparation of the report and the replies to the list of issues, and also conducted monitoring and evaluation activities. There was no real division of labour; they played a part in national policy-making and with implementation at the local level. Although Thailand was a small country, it was large enough to accommodate a variety of players, and there was successful networking and local sharing of tasks. She herself, as well as other members of the delegation, wore both governmental and non-governmental hats.

56. Turning to decentralization, she said that in Thailand, a highly centralized country, there was a strong new movement for decentralization, which had met with fierce opposition from the more traditional quarters, not least the Ministry of the Interior, which exercised provincial control. The Government was not homogeneous: government departments often bickered more among themselves than they did with their non-governmental counterparts. Accordingly, while the desire in some quarters was for rapid decentralization, the mood in others was for a more gradual approach, on the grounds of local unpreparedness. Her own view was that the sooner the umbilical cord was severed, the sooner local communities would stand on their own feet. The potentially independent village, district and provincial committees, with a mandate to attend to children and women in the family, would be financed with central government funds, as well as their own resources, garnered partly from taxes. The National Youth Bureau had no provincial offices, preferring to economize on its resources and work through those organizations at the provincial level.

57. Mrs. KASHEMSANTA (Thailand), replying to questions on decentralization, said that the Youth Promotion and Coordination Subcommittee had been unsuccessful for a variety of reasons, and two new avenues were being explored. Firstly, there were the more than 6,000 local Tambon administrations, whose mandate for the development of children, youth, the family and the elderly had been established by the Act governing Tambon administrative duties. Secondly, discussions were being held to determine new ways of promoting child development and coordination at the provincial

level. A seminar of Tambon councils had recently been held, at which one representative from each province had been briefed on youth development. A survey would be conducted of the organizations involved and the most active one would be selected to implement a pilot project, that would then serve as a model for the decentralization of child and youth development.

58. Ms. CHUTIKUL (Thailand) said that the Constitution had decreed five years as the deadline for completion of the decentralization process. It was of the utmost importance for local inhabitants to become involved. In the past, the provinces had received "orders" from the central Government; the task ahead was to strengthen them for independent action in child and youth development, as well as other fields.

59. Responding to various questions concerning the budget crisis, she explained that resources allocated to social development projects had hardly been affected by the budget cuts. As it was, of the 1999 budget currently being debated in the Senate, 25 per cent - probably the highest proportion ever - had been earmarked for education, shored up by a special fund established for poor students, students at risk, and potential drop-outs. Evidently, since project implementation was quite labour-intensive, a fair proportion would necessarily be spent on salaries. She confessed, however, that the National Youth Bureau had difficulty disaggregating budget allocations for children, inasmuch as many ministries and their various departments implemented child-related programmes, coupled with the fact that children also benefited from broader family-oriented programmes.

60. With regard to the economic crisis, campaigns for social development and on behalf of children and youth had been in progress well before the crisis began. Prostitution, child labour and abuse and street children had been on the agenda for 10 years, and the budget increase had been approved and received well prior to the crisis. Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Bank grants had been deposited in the Central Bank, which had been mandated to administer those funds for catering to the poor, local communities, children and youth, and women.

61. Local communities were currently being trained to write projects so that they could gain access to those grants. In addition to NGO cooperation and specialized assistance from UNICEF, ILO/IPEC (International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour) and UNESCO, bilateral aid agreements for social development projects for children had been concluded with a number of Governments, including Australia, Canada (through the Canadian Industrial Development Agency), Denmark, Japan, and the United States.

62. Replying to Mrs. Mboi, she admitted that more dialogue on child protection was called for. One problem was that the issues raised in the Committee's questionnaire invariably followed a predetermined order, with the result that more time was devoted to the earlier questions to the detriment of others. She wished to propose that the Committee adapt the order of headings and questions to each country's child rights situation. In conclusion, she emphasized the importance of the Committee's recommendations, which would undoubtedly influence the Government's assignment of priorities.

63. Mr. MUNTABHORN (Thailand), apologizing for the inordinate delay in the presentation of his country's initial report, said that the task had been a learning experience for the country. The methodology had been a complex and protracted one involving several phases. Following the first stage of translation of the guidelines into Thai, some 30 papers covering different sections of the guidelines had been submitted by governmental and non-governmental representatives as joint or separate contributions. In order to avoid disparities, the papers had all been reviewed at a public meeting, to which children had been invited to express their views. The contents had then been condensed into the national report drafted in Thai, and subsequently translated into English; the original translator had withdrawn and had had to be replaced. In short, speed had been sacrificed to transparency and broad participation. One solution would be to draft the second report in English, even with the attendant loss of participation, diversity and transparency.

64. Ms. CHUTIKUL (Thailand) asked whether, in view of Thailand's two-year delay in presenting its initial report, the deadline for presentation of its second periodic report could be deferred commensurately.

65. The CHAIRPERSON said that countries were required to be punctual in the submission of their reports. However, the Committee would notify Thailand of its decision regarding a reasonable deadline.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.